

Students at the Center Brief Description

Students at the Center (SAC) is an independent program that works within the Orleans Parish public school system. We are a writing-based program directly serving high schools and middle schools. Our program is funded through a diversity of grants. Some of the grants go directly through the school system and others go through fiscal agents who are community-based programs with whom we partner.

SAC is specifically a writing program. Our basic principle is that all SAC classes must be small. We have a maximum of 15 students per class. Our classes are electives.

SAC operates under three basic principles:

- Students are a resource to and not just an object of the education process.
- Education is for community development in addition to individual student development.
- The campus is the community.

In keeping with these three principles, we require SAC students to do peer teaching. This usually includes high school students working with middle and elementary school students, as well as SAC high school students working with their non-SAC peers in helping to improve writing skills.

Furthermore, SAC initiates and responds to the initiatives of numerous community-based organizations and to other education-based programs in the greater New Orleans area. We promote active partnership with students serving not only as participants and staff, but also students producing work to support the goals and objectives of our partners.

The students benefit by finding their own voices through work as writers, journalists and creative artists. They publish a city-wide teen newspaper. They produce chapbooks—some of which are to be turned into textbooks for national distribution. They make videos addressing teen concerns. They write and perform plays spotlighting the issues they face daily. They serve on community advisory boards. They work as writing mentors in school and after-school programs.

In all these areas of work, the students operate from the base of the elective writing course. This setting gives them the opportunity to train for and reflect upon their work, to develop in a group rather than an individual setting, and to benefit from daily contact with an adult mentor/teacher.